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## **Journalists' professional identity**

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**Abstract:** The internet, and particularly social media, have brought far-reaching change to journalism by calling into question how journalists' traditional roles are perceived. We introduce social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986) — specifically the concept of professional identity — as a complementary approach to study journalistic role conceptions from a dynamic perspective. Building on existing findings in both research streams (professional identity and journalistic role conceptions), we undertook a qualitative study to explore the interplay between journalists' role perceptions, core values of journalism, and ongoing change in the industry. Our analysis of 26 interviews conducted in a Swiss newsroom provided an affirmative answer to the question whether journalists' professional identity serves as a resource that helps them cope with uncertainty. By identifying different identity negotiation mechanisms we illustrate journalists' sensemaking of developments in their work environment. We show that journalists who rely on an elitist, traditional role concept construct online journalism as a threat to quality journalism and journalists' personal status. Another group of journalists with more service-oriented and solutions-oriented role concepts strives to improve newspaper's online journalism. These journalists engage in creating new, adapted role scripts and value definitions.

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## JOURNALISTS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

### A resource to cope with change in the industry?

*The internet, and particularly social media, have brought far-reaching change to journalism by calling into question how journalists' traditional roles are perceived. We introduce social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986) — specifically the concept of professional identity — as a complementary approach to study journalistic role conceptions from a dynamic perspective. Building on existing findings in both research streams (professional identity and journalistic role conceptions), we undertook a qualitative study to explore the interplay between journalists' role perceptions, core values of journalism, and ongoing change in the industry. Our analysis of 26 interviews conducted in a Swiss newsroom provided an affirmative answer to the question whether journalists' professional identity serves as a resource that helps them cope with uncertainty. By identifying different identity negotiation mechanisms we illustrate journalists' sensemaking of developments in their work environment. We show that journalists who rely on an elitist, traditional role concept construct online journalism as a threat to quality journalism and journalists' personal status. Another group of journalists with more service-oriented and solutions-oriented role concepts strives to improve newspaper's online journalism. These journalists engage in creating new, adapted role scripts and value definitions.*

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KEYWORDS *Change; convergence; journalistic role conception; role scripts; online journalism; profession; professional identity; values*

## INTRODUCTION

Technological innovation has transformed every step of the journalistic work process. Today, new skills sets are required (Bakker 2014), and permanent beta is the new normal. The boundaries between journalism and its usership have turned into a "conversation between equal parties" (Starkman 2011). Citizen journalists and bloggers blur the lines between professionals and "the people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2006). Ongoing transformations call into question journalists' traditional role concepts and challenge journalists' status. However, different journalists seem to interpret ongoing change from different perspectives: Some ask if traditional journalism is dead (Hayes 2013),

while others are convinced that these are “great times for journalism” ([www.davidbauer.ch](http://www.davidbauer.ch)). Working with journalists from a variety of Swiss newspapers over the past three years, we identified a dichotomy in journalists’ attitudes and in their perceptions of ongoing change. Some seem to enjoy the emerging opportunities; the new challenges inspire them. They appear to rely on a flexible concept of identity that is capable of absorbing change and readjusting to new situations and requirements. Others appear nostalgic (Grubenmann, Meckel, and Fieseler 2013) and concerned about basic journalistic principles being endangered. They appeared to rely on status and traditional values, which change, and to fear the reallocation of power in the industry.

Inspired by the divergent attitudes, we asked: *How does journalists’ professional identity influence their perceptions and interpretations of the changes in their profession? Does journalists’ professional identity serve as a resource that allows them to cope with far-reaching change in their profession?* In the resulting study, we interviewed 26 journalists from a Swiss daily newspaper. We talked about their motivations for becoming a journalist, their aspirations, and their perceptions of ongoing change. Based on the interview data, we identified two groups, which differ in the identity negotiation mechanisms, which their representatives apply and the professional identity on which they rely.

In our study, we suggest that, in journalism studies, social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner 1986) — specifically, the concept of professional identity — is a complementary approach to examining journalistic role conceptions. We see a potential to link professional identity research, which is mostly done in organizational studies, to journalistic role conceptions, in order to benefit from existing findings in both these fields. The two concepts relate to each other, because SIT defines the links between the individual and the macro perspectives, which describes “the synergetic interaction between person and societal-cultural context” (Operario and Fiske 1999, 42), while journalism studies researchers investigate how “how socialization and life circumstances shape [journalists’ role perceptions]” (Meyen and Riesmeyer 2012, 390). The combination of the two perspectives allows us to research the “reciprocal interaction” (Yuthas, Dillard, and Rogers 2004, 231) between the professional role conception and the changes in the tasks, relationships, and areas of responsibility. Our study’s primary contribution is its integration of a *dynamic* component into the investigation of journalistic role conceptions and the illustration of journalists’ identity negotiation in a changeable environment.

In the following, we introduce the professional identity concept, focusing on the change processes. We then provide a brief overview of the different research streams in journalism studies, tracing changes in journalists’ role perceptions to identify the contributions of our approach. Based on this introduction, we present and discuss the findings of the qualitative study at hand, exploring the influence of journalists’ professional identity on their perceptions of change in the industry. In a concluding section, we discuss our findings and their relevance with a view to current trends in journalism and those on the horizon.

## PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The concept of professional identity originated from SIT (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel 1981; Turner 1975; Turner 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986) and related self-categorization theory (Turner et al. 1987). At the individual level, identity is composed of two parts: personal identity and (several) social identities. Social identities often manifest themselves in professions and occupations (Barley 1989; Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep 2006; Trice 1993). An individual's profession is an important area of social identification: a social group's characteristics are related to the individual's self, and distinctive group norms serve as guidelines for an individual's behavior (Ellemers, Gilder, and Haslam 2004). Tajfel defined social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and *value significance* to him [or her] of this group membership" (Tajfel 1972, 31; emphasis added). In the context of group membership, "individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from a comparison out-group on some *valued dimension*" (Haslam 2004, 21; emphasis added). This becomes especially true if individuals internalize group membership as an aspect of their self-concept. In situations of conflicting interpretations, such as change processes in organizations, members of a lower-status group (in comparison to a higher-status group) may stress the inferiority of the in-group in respect of *status-relevant* dimensions and may emphasize their own superiority in respect of *status-irrelevant* dimensions (Terry and Callan 1998).

The changing nature of professions — specifically the antagonism between management and the profession — has been widely studied in the past years, with a strong focus on healthcare, where doctors are increasingly acting and reacting to managerial change agendas (Hotho 2008). Journalism, which is affected by comparable developments concerning the increased management orientation of especially editors-in-chief (Hujanen 2009), has not yet been considered within this research stream.

Hotho (2008) calls that employees not be seen as victims of change processes, but as social agents capable of transforming structures through their choices and actions (Whittington 1994; Forrester 2000; Yuthas, Dillard, and Rogers 2004). She stresses that professional membership is "one of the most significant extra-organizational group ideologies mediating individual action" (Hotho 2008, 726). In her study, she combines the concept of professional identity with structuration theory (Giddens 1984) to overcome the dualism of the micro and macro levels of analysis and to allow for a "theoretical bridge between the collective and the individual level" (Hotho 2008, 722). This theoretical realignment opens the perspective to "reciprocal interaction" (Yuthas et al. 2004, 231) between the social structure and human actors. This conceptual step is important for us to study the interplays between traditional role concepts and far-reaching changes in journalists' daily work.

In her study of Scottish primary care reform, Hotho (2008) shows how general practitioners use and rewrite their profession's scripts. Professionals apply cognitive strategies of reduction (Abbott 1988) to confirm that medical activity is superior to management activity. By drawing on new scripts, they contribute to the profession's changing identity. Hotho calls individuals' attempts to differentiate themselves from existing

reference groups as well as efforts to seek new salient in-groups, a typical consequence of change. She refers to Brewer (2001), who points out that, in larger high-status groups, a tendency towards the formation of smaller salient subgroups is frequently a means to achieve optimum group distinctiveness. Hotho (2008) further shows how a professional élite, which sees itself as the potential leaders of the (emerging) profession, is formed. Such an élite perceives the current professional scripts as constraining; it desires change. This group becomes more hierarchical and its members compete intraprofessionally, which again becomes a driver of change. This study draws on Hotho's findings by analyzing journalists' perceptions of their profession's ongoing transformation. Our study complements Hotho's findings by extending her research into the field of journalism and by comparing opposing interpretations of an ongoing change process.

## **PROFESSIONAL ROLE CONCEPTS IN JOURNALISM**

Singer (1997, 1998) and Deuze (1998, 1999) were among the first to conduct research on journalistic role change induced by technological innovation in the 1990s. Singer called for the renewal of the gatekeeper concept (White 1950), which she saw as being in conflict with digital media's interactivity. Years later, Bruns (2005) as well as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010) presented developed journalistic role concepts based on gatekeeper theory. Donsbach (2010), with a more general approach, points to the opportunity to rethink and redefine the profession, referring to four major challenges in the field: a declining audience for and reputation of the profession, the profession's loss of identity, and market pressures. He subsequently proposes regarding journalism as the "new knowledge profession" (45) and discusses related competences. In his approach, he relates structure and practice, and places both in relation to a changeable context. He further claims corresponding adaptations for journalism education. Deuze (2005) goes a step further back by referring to ideology as the superordinate concept in journalism and base for both newswriters' professional perceptions and their praxis. Referring to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), Golding and Elliott (1979) as well as Merrit (1995), he brings into play five journalistic core values: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics. To him, the ideology of journalism holds the potential to serve as the "social cement of the professional group of journalists" (2005, 455) that holds journalism together in an increasingly complex and changeable environment. He speaks of the potential to analyze journalists' negotiations of these core values to gain a dynamic perspective on *what* journalism is in society. A corresponding dynamic perspective seems the only way that does justice to a "rapidly evolving" environment (Niblock 2007, 20) characterized by "mind-blowing uncertainty" (Domingo, Masip, and Costera Meijer 2015, 56). Meyen and Riesmeyer (2012) contribute an interesting perspective by developing a theory of the journalistic field, "which shows how journalists' role perceptions are related to their position in the journalistic field and their personal capital" (387). Relying on Bourdieu's theory of the field (1984), their extensive qualitative study generates eight empirical journalistic role perception types, which speak into journalists' positions in the journalistic field and the extents of autonomy these positions

provide: service providers, sentinels, detectives, teachers, artists, lobbyists, traders, and promoters. Individual role perceptions are further shaped by the symbolic capital of the topics journalists are working on. This impressive work on contemporary role conceptions grounded in elaborated theoretical reflections, and extensive qualitative data, constitute important reference points for our own study. By referring to social identity theory and relating to Deuze's (2005) reflections, we seek to contribute an additional but complementary avenue to approach journalistic role conceptions by developing a dynamic perspective on the research object. Quantitative long-term studies (realized for instance by Willnat, Weaver, and Choi (2013)) to an extent also allow for the identification of dynamic components in journalists' role perceptions, but in a different form. Our focus is the identification of mechanisms that speak into the interplay of journalists' role perceptions, the core values of journalism, and ongoing change in the industry.

## **A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF JOURNALISTS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

Our study investigates how Swiss journalists' professional identity influences their perceptions and evaluations of the current changes affecting their profession. By analyzing journalists' reasoning in interviews focusing on their experiences of the convergence process, we sought to distinguish divergent lines of argumentation and role scripts between journalists who accept ongoing change and the emerging principles of online journalism and journalists who are refusing it. By studying the interviewees' use of professional role scripts — whether traditional, established versions, or divergent, emerging forms — we sought to identify journalists' underlying professional identity and its influence on their interpretations and sensemaking. Our study thus raises the question: *do journalists' professional identities have the potential to serve as a resource to help them cope with far-reaching change in their work environments?* Finding answers to this question gives our study three aims: We seek to develop a complementary approach to study journalists' role concepts by applying the professional identity concept in combination with the structuration theory perspective in this research field. Second, considering this theoretical perspective, we seek to apply a *dynamic* perspective on the study of journalistic role conceptions, researching the interplays between journalists' role perceptions, the core values of journalism, and changes in the industry. Last, we are interested in the influence of journalists' professional identities on their readiness for change. Our focus is thus not on the creation of typologies, unlike Meyen and Riesmeyer (2009), but more on the exploitation of mechanisms in journalists' identity work in changeable environments.

### *Context: the converged newsroom of a Swiss newspaper*

We conducted our study in the newsroom of a Swiss daily newspaper. At the time of the study (summer 2013), the editorial team consisted of 200 journalists and 26 producers (e.g. art directors, photographers, or the video team), 10 departments, the news desk, and a data and a TV team, who supported the departments. The paper founded its digital brand in 1997

with a “very autonomous” (interviewee 20, line 87f.) online team, comprising around 15 journalists, who are responsible for the published content. In 2012, the paper converged its two editorial teams by “integrating” (interviewee 20, line 411) the online journalists into the existing print departments. The editorial team is structured according to the journalists’ dossier competencies, meaning that senior journalists are exclusively responsible for specific issues. We found that the resultant team structure constitutes a basic challenge for the converged newsroom, since the journalists’ perception is that they carry a dual burden, because they are responsible for the online and the print coverage of their particular issue(s).

During our study, we identified liberal-mindedness, autonomy, quality, and expert knowledge as core values of the newspaper’s organizational identity. The various departments enjoy extensive autonomy regarding their coverage, agenda-setting, and decision-making. The journalists are also autonomous. The editorial management left the extent to which the journalists implement online journalism principles (e.g. linking in digital news coverage, interactivity, and self-promotion via Twitter or Facebook) or participate in online projects open to their discretion and motivation. Online activity, involvement, and advanced training are optional and required the journalists to show initiative. Even though the journalists appreciate their autonomy, several team members criticized the editor-in-chief’s tolerance.

#### *Data source*

To gain a first impression of the newsroom culture and current issues characterizing journalists’ daily work, we had several informal talks with the editorial team members. By (passively) attending advanced training workshops for well over six months, we became even better acquainted with the organization. As the main part of our study, we conducted 26 semi-structured in-depth interviews with six female and 20 male journalists during the summer of 2013. The list of the interview partners was compiled with the help of the newspaper’s editor-in-chief. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes (with the exception of one interview, which lasted three hours). All the interviews were taped and transcribed, comprising 548 pages of data. One interview was conducted by phone (with a correspondent in the U.S.). The interview outline provided three fixed points to allow us to respond flexibly to the interviewees’ answers: (1) The participants’ motivations for becoming a journalist, (2) the participants’ evaluations of the current work in the converged newsroom, and (3) the participants’ appraisals of the newspaper’s future (a 10-year perspective). The chosen open interview design gave the interviewees scope to simultaneously apply their professional identities to the given context of a converged newsroom and to guide the conversation towards directions with particular meaning for them.

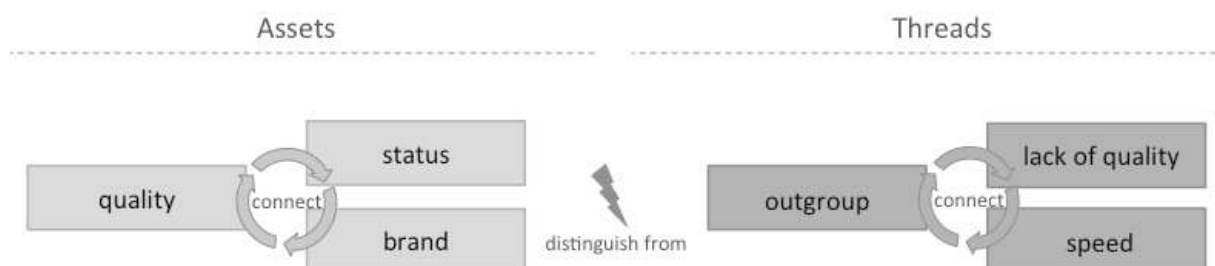
#### *Data analysis*

Two researchers analyzed all the interview data and discussed their coding and interpretations in joint sessions. We applied inductive, thematic analysis (Mischler 1986;

Riessman 1993) to investigate the interplay of journalists' professional identities, underlying role scripts, and their perceptions and interpretations of their work in the newsroom. By moving iteratively between the data, emerging themes, and existing theory in several phases, we followed the (theoretical) coding approach borrowed from grounded theory as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1996). In the first analysis phase, we examined all the material to obtain an informed impression of the data and to identify common topics and narratives. We identified shared patterns, and discussed the journalists' divergent interpretations. We had already recognized the use of divergent professional scripts and could relate the scripts to interpretations of the previous and current changes in the newsroom. The different elements led to our first-level constructs, which were the starting point for the second analysis phase. By reviewing our first-level constructs and relating these to prior research — particularly the work of Hotho (2008), Meyen and Riesmeyer (2012), and Deuze (2005) — we identified both group delimitation strategies and status conservation strategies. These insights led to another coding session, to generate second-level constructs, and to the model presented in the following section (see Figure 1). We completed the analysis through several iterative loops of interpretation, discussion, theory alignment, and refinement of our model.

## FINDINGS

The editorial team members basically accept the converged newsroom and do not regard returning to the former structure with separated teams for online and print as a viable option. Despite this agreement, we still distinguish two groups that differ in their evaluations of the previous changes and their current work conditions. Based on the professional scripts to which the journalists referred in their argumentation, we distinguish two groups, which we call the *arts group* and the *craft group*. We identified 11 representatives of the *arts group* and 15 of the *craft group*. While we only identified one former online journalist as a representative of the *arts group*, this does not mean that the former team affiliation (print or online) constitutes the group belonging criterion. In the *craft group*, we find a balanced mix between former online and print journalists.



**FIGURE 1:** Basic identity negotiation mechanisms in the arts group's argumentation



### *Basic conflict: quality vs. speed*

Deuze stresses the importance of core values inherent in journalism's ideology, which build the "social cement" (2005, 455) that holds journalism together in changeable times. Quality and immediacy (i.e. speed, hastiness, and swift decision-making (Deuze 2005)) belong both to these core values (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001; Merrit 1995; Golding and Elliott 1979). Deuze advises that one study the development of and differences in the interpretation of these values. Following this approach, we identified the basic conflict about the importance of quality and the influence of speed (as a characteristic of immediacy) on the paper's journalism as a basic conflict characterizing the newsroom's work culture. For representatives of the *arts group*, quality represents the core value of the newspaper's print journalism and constitutes the basic reference point for their self-enhancement. Representatives of the *craft group* cannot refer to quality in their identity construction and thus lack an important reference point:

*"Online has negative effects on print. I do not blame it for anything. [These articles] have been written at another speed. They have mainly been written to provide some information as soon as possible. I think it is simply unacceptable that journalists just copy press releases. But this is what happens online, very often, simply due to time pressures (interviewee 6, line 219ff.)."*

Speed, on the other hand, has a negative connotation in the newsroom. It is the central value attributed to online journalism and stands for fast, (breaking) news-oriented coverage of minor value — at least for the representatives of the *arts group*. They see speed as the driving force behind the lack of quality in the newspaper's online journalism and as a threat to the newspaper brand and journalists' personal status. Quality and speed are perceived as conflictive and hardly compatible (with speed obviously not (yet) seen as a potential characteristic of quality). The two dimensions become opposite poles in the convergence discussion in this newsroom. Based on this basic conflict that characterizes the discussion on convergence and current changes in journalism, we will now first turn to the *arts group* before introducing the *craft group*.

### *The arts group: fear of status degradation*

Based on their perceptions of ongoing change and their (cognitive) evaluations of the shifting group relationships, journalists activate social cognitive self-enhancement strategies to adjust their social identity to the changing environment. This is apparent in the *arts group* representatives, who apply a very conservative and elitist attitude. Their argumentation gave us the impression of meeting *artists* or representatives of an intellectual elite, ready to talk about their actions or their approaches towards quality. As an end in itself, the artist's work must meet his or her personal standards, or those of the epistemic community, rather than those of a democracy (until here we find far-reaching parallels to Meyen and Riesmeyer's (2012) type also called *artists* but not in the further). When we examined these journalists' argumentations, the concepts were far from journalistic; for instance, a

*watchdog* (e.g. Kovach and Rosenstiel 2010), or the *fourth estate* (e.g. Lewis, Williams, and Franklin 2008). However, these attitudes are not limited to representatives of a single department. The *arts group* representatives were from the business, the local and the sports departments, as well as correspondents. Beside this diversity, the *arts group's* representatives were all males.

*Sources of journalists' self-enhancement.* We identified three sources of self-enhancement in the *art group*:

- (1) Conservative journalistic role concepts characterized by journalists' former mass communication monopoly and their related status (e.g. a refusal to contribute to interactivity).

*"Yes, that's a good question... to what extent do we want to engage in a dialog with our readers? ... [repeating the question] Don't we employ people for this type of task? Social media managers...?" (interviewee 23, line 924f.).*

- (2) The organization of the newsroom according to the individuals' dossier competences. The resultant team structure turns journalists into topic-specific experts and fosters their perception as such in society.

*"To deliver a valuable analysis, something that is not simply obvious. To go on and on and to know that much about a topic that allows me to make statements others cannot. Knowing this company particularly well makes me an expert who is capable of saying something extraordinary that is profound [...]" (interviewee 1, line 93ff.)*

- (3) Representatives of the *arts group* relate their status to the value dimension *quality* and link it to the newspaper brand. In the following, they construct a threat scenario in which current changes, or specific elements of it, endanger these assets (i.e. journalists' status, quality journalism, the newspaper brand). We will elaborate on this strategy in the next section, since it constitutes the basic mechanism of the *arts group's* sensemaking strategy (see Figure 1).

*"This is a further problem, that everything happens under the same family brand. This also counts as quick notification. If it lacks quality, our brand is damaged" (interviewee 1, line 355ff.).*

*Strategies of self-enhancement and degradation.* The journalists in the *arts group* relate their status to the value dimension *quality* and link it to the newspaper brand. They construct a threat scenario in which online journalism threatens quality journalism. This reflects these journalists' underlying fear of the ongoing changes. Their status in society, in their community, and within the editorial team forms the foundation of their professional identity and builds on the traditional journalistic system, which they see as endangered. In their interpretation, they define their superior status by applying four self-enhancement strategies:

- (1) Stressing the acceptance procedures they had to experience to become part of the editorial team and comparing it to the current hiring procedure.

*"For online, they hired many inexperienced people. I don't want to say that they are bad at what they do, of course they can be highly skilled. But for print, we apply certain requirements, that people must be experienced in journalism in order to get hired. By hiring people who were 'a bargain' fostered certain prejudices" (interviewee 6, line 299ff.).*

- (2) Highlighting personal privileges as an external appraisal.

*"There is awareness [among editorial managers] that journalists require a certain contemplation level in order to produce good text, particularly for the Feuilleton" (interviewee 4, line 134).*

- (3) Stressing personal ambitions and relating this to a certain way of working.

*"I have my quality standard and I want to meet it. If my work no longer meets this standard, I will become unmanageable. Then I might even refuse to obey orders or something." (interviewee 6, line 314f.)*

- (4) Linking personal status with the brand's status to emphasize superiority.

*"I would not have started working at any paper. [The newspaper brand I work for] was the standard I aspired to, which reflected my personal ambition" (interviewee 1, line 44).*

Individuals seek maximum differentiation between the group most salient for their social identity and non-salient out-groups (Hotho 2008). In our study, representatives of the *arts group* distinguished themselves from the out-group (young journalists and new team members, former members of the online team), which they disregard. They present the out-group as a threat to the quality of the newspaper's journalism and to the newspaper brand. They activate social competition strategies to challenge the out-group's status, because change threatens their in-group. We identified two strategies that the *arts group* applied to differentiate their in-group from the out-group:

- On the one hand, they connect the in-group (variable: former members of the print team, long-established journalists, members of their department), its members' status, and their way of working with the value dimension *quality*.
- On the other hand, they construct a negative relationship between the out-group and quality by presenting the out-group and its members as well as speed, which is an essential characteristic of online journalism, as a threat to quality.

*"I believe that the problem manifested itself for the first time with the former [the brand name]-online, as this never reflected [the brand name]'s quality. They drifted away... It probably never intended to, but in fact it became a separate entity, one*

*that never met our standards. [...] We never regarded our standards as represented by this thing” (interviewee 4, line 283f.).*

These strategies help representatives of the *arts group* to construct online journalism and its related principles and journalists as a threat to quality, one of the paper’s core values. Representatives of the *arts group* dominate the arguments in this conflict, since the *craft group* lacks the shared values and scripts on which to rely for alternative interpretations.

### *The craft group: identity formation in progress*

For representatives of the *craft group*, the future promises good opportunities to upgrade status, in relation to both the editorial team and society. Digital know-how has become indispensable, and digital channels are increasingly attracting the editorial management’s attention. However, we did not find explicit evidence for such considerations in the interviews; quite the opposite: Former members of the online team feel of little value and still experience the two-tier culture dating back to pre-convergence times. Representatives of the two groups agreed that a certain dichotomy still exists, even though only the *arts group* representatives mentioned reasons for this situation (e.g. the employment of young, unqualified staff in combination with insufficient training).

*“Here in print, we are all economists, all well-educated economists [...] we have consistent quality standards. This, to some extent, is the difference between us and the online people” (interviewee 1, line 386ff.)*

*Search for reference points.* Representatives of the *craft group* do not perceive one another as a social unit within the newsroom. The previous online team still constitutes former online journalists’ primary in-group. In the course of the convergence, they were allocated to different departments. Thus, we found representatives of the *craft group* distributed throughout the newsroom, which makes a physical perception impossible – especially compared to the *arts group* representatives, who relate strongly to their department. Owing to the absence of a unifying in-group, the former online journalists accentuated their superiority in terms of status-irrelevant dimensions by referring to the familiar atmosphere, and the “independent” and “autonomous” work conditions that they had appreciated in their former online team, to re-establish positive distinctiveness (Terry and Callan identified this strategy as applied by low-status groups in their study of two hospitals undergoing a merger in 1998). Representatives of the *craft group* also lacked shared reference points and role scripts. While we find some references to speed, these are not persuasive, as speed as a value has a negatively connotation. This indicates ongoing negotiations about potential quality dimensions for digital journalism. In contrast to the *arts group*, we found that the *craft group* did not refer to a shared out-group to construct their identity. For social comparison, they admiringly refer to international examples of best practice and worthwhile standards of online coverage, as *The Guardian*, *Spiegel Online*, or *Frankfurter Allgemeine*.

*Product design as identity work.* The *craft group's* fundamental criticisms of the internal processes, structures, and infrastructure as essential resources for conducting online journalism unifies its journalists. Interestingly, references to the newspaper's print journalism characterized the interviews with representatives of the *arts group*, while the *craft group's* focus on providing (better) online journalism characterized the interviews with representatives of this group. Representatives of the *arts group* act on traditional, print-oriented role scripts, while representatives of the *craft group* develop new role scripts by relying on emerging online journalism principles.

*"This is why I am producing videos with the guys from the video team. [...] That's what it's all about: many people stand still. You know, no one ever had to ask me if I was able to use Photoshop, HTML or other tools. And whatever I was unable to do, I taught myself the next weekend" (interviewee 24, line 101ff.).*

Even though representatives of *craft group* disparage the newspaper's online journalism, particularly the conditions for providing online journalism, it is not at all destructive; it is a constructive discussion and willingness to be part of the problem-solving or the further development. Their efforts to optimize the newspaper's online journalism seem to reflect their search for an adapted identity in a changeable environment. Discussions about justified or unjustified value attributions (e.g. *what is quality?*) speak into not only the need for an adapted digital editorial strategy and the need for new storytelling formats but, even more, the professional "ideology of journalism at work" (Deuze 2005, 458).

*"You know, here you often find the attitude, and I am very angry about this, that we won't be the fastest ones, but we do it more slowly in favor of more accuracy. Meanwhile, I think this is total bullshit" (interviewee 15, line 212f.).*

On the one hand, they seem to rejoice in exploring the potentials of digital and to be intrinsically motivated in finding new, better solutions. On the other hand, they stress the necessity to adapt to the technical work environment to improve certain workflows. They have three basic points of criticism considering the conditions to provide online journalism:

- (1) While the editorial management would claim online first, the print orientation dominates daily workflows.

*"We just have conflicting workflows, because they are obviously dictated by print" (interviewee 22, line 557).*

- (2) The lack of a convincing digital editorial strategy and someone charged with its implementation.

*"These are often random decisions that would be made differently only one week later. Yes, what I am basically missing in this whole convergence discussion, if I can say this here and now, is someone responsible for online. In my view, this is mandatory" (interviewee 11, line 254f.).*

(3) The lack of contemporary technological infrastructure according to international industry standards.

*“And then, technically. In my view, this is a key point: we need better infrastructure. Our content management system is a total catastrophe!” (interviewee 12, line 554f.).*

Representatives of the *craft group*’s attitudes and involvement stand in contrast to representatives of the *arts group*’s refusal to take part in the development process. Their statements gave the impression of strong indifference. These journalists seem to be motivated to maintain the status quo and, thus, the superior status of their in-group. Regarding this attitude as a protective mechanism to prevent loss of face during the interviews would be an alternative interpretation, since many of these journalists lack the expertise to interpret certain challenges and discuss potential problem-solving ideas.

*“My only task is it to create an interesting Feuilleton with my colleagues and the freelancers, and to work on interesting topics we think might interest our readers. The editorial management is in charge of everything else [...]. We have a division of labor, and it is not my job to think about strategies for gaining more readers” (interviewee 5, line 412ff.).*

*Uncertainty as a space to live out role concepts.* The representatives of the *craft group* are not alone in realizing that past norms and values cannot be extrapolated unchanged into the digital sphere. But in comparison to representatives of the *arts group*, they do not shy away from confronting this, even appreciating some uncertainty, which provides them with opportunities to play a part in the recreation processes.

*“This newspaper finds itself in a period of extreme change. We are trying to reinvent ourselves as well as journalism. I find it exciting to be a part of this. I mostly don’t see it as a problem [...] I think it’s fascinating to explore how the digital sphere works” (interviewee 12, line 14ff.).*

It appears as if representatives of the *craft group* appreciate this scope for development outside of beaten paths dominated by representatives of the *arts group*’s interpretations to live out (certain aspects of) their professional identity. The excitement they experience speaks of the creativity of *craft*, not of *arts*: hands-on, down-to-earth, and unpretentious. For representatives of the *craft group*, the experienced uncertainty means “especially fun” (interviewee 11, line 636), because they do not fear a degradation in status.

*“I told them about being indifferent. I can sit in the cellar if I know that people actually read my stuff...” (interviewee 22, line 191).*

Since representatives of the *arts group* do not (yet) expand their influence into digital fields, representatives of the *craft group* discover an uncharted area that is open to their

experimentation and creativity. Resulting know-how advances would provide them with opportunities to demonstrate their superiority over representatives of the *arts group* and to activate delimitation efforts. However, corresponding strategies have not been identified. A potential explanation is that the delineation against this out-group becomes irrelevant in the emerging system. References to status symbols of the previous system no longer not constitute landmarks, as the meanings of different values have not been transformed directly to the new system. Deuze's (2005) discussion of the value *autonomy* illustrates this and is transferable to our study: Whereas an autonomous way of working for representatives of the *arts group* predominantly means contemplation, time at one's disposal, and independence. For representatives of the *craft group*, it further meant opportunities to realize digital journalism independent from print standards or the culture of the former online team, distant from the *arts group's* hierarchical thinking.

## DISCUSSION AND OUTLOOK

With our study, which builds on SIT, we introduced an alternative perspective to research dynamic components in journalistic role conceptions. By contrasting two groups' identity negotiation mechanisms in a Swiss newsroom, we illustrate how journalists' interpretations of change, of different core values of journalism, and their professional identities interplay in these days of "mind-blowing uncertainty" (Domingo, Masip, and Costera Meijer 2015, 55). With our qualitative study, we considered journalists' limited knowledge on the role concepts that influence their practice. To compensate for this limitation, we analyzed their identity work in times of change and focused on their references to journalistic values and their interpretations of these. Values, anchored in the ideology of journalism, give these journalists "legitimacy and credibility to what they do" (Deuze 2005, 446).

Our study thereby complements Hotho's work (2008) by contrasting two groups' applied social strategies to cope with ongoing change in their profession. While our analysis of the *arts group* was mostly in line with the cognitive strategies identified by Hotho, our analysis of the *craft group* generated further insights into the identity work for the development of new role scripts. While representatives of the *arts group* referred to quality as a fundamental reference point for their identity construction, we did not find a corresponding behavior among the *craft group* representatives. For these journalists, quality or immediacy (i.e. speed) as core values of journalism must first become renegotiated and reinterpreted before they can be transferred into digital journalism. In the way the paper's digital news products are still under construction, the *craft group's* identity formation is also still under construction.

Another element of representatives of the *craft group's* identity formation is their (to date unsuccessful) quest for new salient in-groups or reference groups. For the former online journalists, the current situation is particularly unsettling: They lost their group belonging when the online editorial team was dispersed and most of them had not (yet) developed a sense of belonging to the department to which they were assigned. The absence of internal digital reference points (i.e. a digital editorial strategy, or prototypes of

brand-specific online coverage) indicate that the renegotiation of journalistic core values in this editorial team is still in progress, which in turn (for now) hinders the development of adapted role scripts.

By referring to their particular department's principles and their orientations towards traditional journalistic values (i.e. quality), the *arts group's* reference activities show the formation of smaller salient subgroups within the newsroom. According to Brewer (2001), this realignment of identity orientation serves to achieve optimum group distinctness and is a typical consequence of change. According to experts' recommendations, editorial teams need to detach themselves from fixed department structures to cover *wicked problems* (Rosen 2012), such as Quartz's obsession journalism ([www.newsthing.net](http://www.newsthing.net)), because a distinctive departmental focus might hinder journalists who need to collaborate in cross-departmental teams.

The analysis of individual sensemaking and negotiation of practice on the one hand and the transformation of shared values and divergent identity concepts on the other hand shows us the *reciprocal interaction* between journalists' activities on a micro level and the journalistic role concept on a macro level. In our data, we found both the defense of traditional values against contemporary working conditions and the search for new reference points tailored for a changeable landscape. This illustrates the flexibility of journalistic role scripts and the potential to interpret change as beneficial and enabling. It further shows the profession's elasticity, which provides scope for personal role concepts adapted to perceived change. The profession's tolerance and the interplay between values, practice, role concepts, and scripts make professional identity a resource to help cope with change and uncertainty. However, our study deviates from existing research into journalistic role conception since, owing to our reference to SIT, we focus journalists' professional *identity* components than their *role* perceptions. However, differences between different approaches in this research field are blurred and their integration is particularly valuable.

The study is a first attempt to introduce the professional identity concept in combination with structuration theory, in order to contribute to the ongoing discussion of journalistic role conceptions. Identified mechanisms in journalists' identity constructions must be elaborated further. We need more data and experience with this alternative approach of studying journalistic role conceptions. The present study was limited to a single editorial team delivering daily journalism. This research should be extended to other forms of journalism (e.g. weekly, Sunday, and free commuter papers, as well as magazines) and the influence of journalists' professional identities on other aspects of their work (e.g. user interaction, or preferred modes of working) by applying a qualitative approach.

We identified only men as representatives of the *arts group*, which also needs further investigation. In this study, this occurrence might be case-specific owing to the predominantly conservative team structures (women have not yet reached comparable seniority compared to their male colleagues owing to past employment criteria). However, since we also identified younger (male) journalists (who had not yet reached senior status) as representatives of the *arts group*, this could lead to the hypothesis that this predominant



self-concept is a particularly masculine attitude. To research such assumptions, we will extend our research to other editorial teams.

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